

The problem of pronunciation and delivery in the context of Saudi Arabia

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Abstract:

The paper titled “The problem of pronunciation and delivery in the context of Saudi Arabia” investigates the cultural and psychological barriers in the teaching of English language. It also examines the factors that hinder the learning act and while suggesting remedies it looks into the very psyche that enervates teaching English in Saudi Arabia.

Key words: Terror, aversion, dislike, disdain.

1. INTRODUCTION

English language has been a vexed issue in the context of the non-native learners and it becomes more of an issue when it is used by the Arab world and more particularly the Kingdom of Saudi Arab where the urge to learn the language is very strong but the collision of the languages which also entail cultural collisions hinder possibly the very act of learning. Like all languages English language too has certain idiosyncrasies reflected in the problematic delivery of the words like “Centre, Culture, kleptomaniac, kerfuffle, version, nation, manifestation,

Psychology, Photography etc. It's difficult for a non-native speaker to discriminate between the sounds as in centre "C" is used for the sound "S" where as in the word culture "C" produces the sound of "K". Identically the words like version and nation, vision the sounds tend to be too confusing for the new learners who are non-native. "Sion" in version or vision produces the sound of shun whereas in the words like nation and manifestation or representation the sounds produced by the last few letters is identical to the sound produced by Sion. Here the problem is to develop a sense of language that is demanding at times the learners are pulverized to the extent of a dislike. In Arabic the sounds there is no such apparent confusion and thus the native speakers of Arabic find it convenient to get the words right.

The second aspect of the same problem is the way the language is taught by the non-native speakers who are somewhat themselves stumped by the oddity of a language that demands a certain degree of proficiency, for example, once questioned by a non-native learner to explain the oddity of the sounds and the delivery of words the way they ought to be delivered raise many questions and leave the non-native speakers unconvinced as to why Photo starts with P or psychology starts with P again. The non-native speakers or teachers leave it to the oddity of the language rather than to find a convincing explanation to satisfy the curiosity of the non-native learners. Foreign language acquisition has a certain issues that need to be sorted out beforehand.

2. DISCUSSION

There are two factors that generally govern the language learning process.

1. Heredity
2. Environment.

In case of Heredity the problem of inheritance does not exist as the child gets the language he is to speak in his life and therefore the troubles do not start at any stage of his life. Thus the heredity issue is an important factor that aids the language learning process.

Environment is natural as far as the native language is concerned that does not coerce the learner into flexing muscles to acquire the language of his choice. The broken words like Baba, Mama in every culture and society are picked up naturally with its equivalent in other languages. The point is the students of Saudi Arabia come to learn this language at an age when mind refuses to accept it as natural indoctrination and it progressively becomes the language with alien taste and character. The late or delayed introduction of the language also comes from the idea of a subdued cultural invasion through the linguistic infiltration not taken very kindly by the mature learners and thus the environment instead of being conducive becomes hostile.

While teaching in a University of Saudi Arabia my experiences have been very diverse. We get learners of diverse hues; some are willing to learn while some are coercive learners. Willing learners go into the intricacy of the language learning process while the students either dull or confused or resigned tend to cave in given the dynamics of the linguistic structure. At times they yawn, stretch their legs, look to the other side of the window apparently disinclined but the academic compulsions drive them to negotiate with a language that agitates their psychology. Thus the space for interest shrivels radically and only academic interest survives. In a condition like this the task of a teacher becomes much more challenging because the pressures of the foreign language and its typical structure enervates the interest and the pressures under which they have to learn becomes even higher and thus the result is never encouraging. I will quote one example adduced from a research in Sudan where the Suadenese found

it equally difficult to cope up with the pressures of the foreign language.

The researcher spent many days at (SUST) observing the pronunciation of English words by the students at (SUST) and the result of this observation at the university is twofold; first, it was noticed that the students have problems in the pronunciation of some English sounds for instance they confuse the contrast sounds e.g. here are some words and how the students pronounce them next to each word (service /servais/, document /dɒcument/, 'women' /wumen/, 'obstacle' /ɔbsteikl/, 'performance' /pə:fɔ:mans/ so in the first word they used the long form instead of short form, in the second word they used /u/ instead of /ju/, in the word women they used /u/ instead of /i/ in the word 'performance' they pronounced it with long vowel /ə:/ instead of short one /ə/. So we find that they confuse different pronunciations of each vowel as if there is only one pronunciation for each sound according to their knowledge. Second, is that they have some errors with some consonants that do not exist in Sudanese Spoken Arabic e.g. /θ ð p v/ so they replace them with /s z b f/. During the listening of the SSEs pronunciation of English words the researcher found that they pronounce some words with mistakes e.g. they don't differentiate between (s-sound and θ -sound) so they usually use /s/ instead of /θ/ if we ask them to pronounce words like (bath, math, theatre) to pronounce them, they replace the dental /θ/ with the alveolar /s/ so they pronounce them as (bas, mas, seatre). They also have some mistakes with other fricatives (z and ð) they replace the dental ð with the alveolar z, s.

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The quoted research is an extension of the problems discussed so far as Sudan too is an Arabic speaking country and the

highlighted in the investigation generally reflect the same problems shared and faced by them. Another factor that constitutes the most challenging of task is the ability of the teachers or trainers involved and their background because other non-native speakers are in a fix to fix the issue because they do not find it convenient to deal with the cultural aspects a language represents. An Arabic speaker indifferent response has a political dimension too since English is viewed as the language of the conquerors and thus the prejudice of a very mild kind gets expressed in the dislike for the language.

The second aspect of the same problem is the delivery of the words which cannot be seen in isolation from pronunciation. In Arabic too dialects influenced by regions or patios vary in tone and delivery. There are Arabic nations that pronounce one single word differently, for example, Moya, means water. In certain regions of the Arab world it is delivered as “Miayaa, Mouaa. For a foreign speaker the two different pronunciations tend to confuse as to the actual delivery of the word and thus it is only possible that different versions of a particular word does exist. Another issue is local impact that tampers with the delivery of the words. In this case the Irish pronunciation becomes just a case in point. Irish speakers speak English but their delivery of words is very different and to the extent that it almost sounds a different language or at least the standard dictionaries do not approve of them. Given such intricacies it only compounds the task of the non-native trainers while training the non-native speakers or learners.

3. CULTURAL DIFFERENCES

Culture does have a role in determining the way a language progresses. Postmodernist thinkers have greatly valued the role of the culture in the existence of a language. Culture is the basic ingredient that sustains the formation of a language and thus its impact is even greater in actually moulding a language.

In the Arab world one of the issues is also the alternatives available and in extensive day to day use of the words which in other parts of the world which have been colonies of the West rely on English words such as Post Office, Hospital, Refrigerator, Road, Flat, clinic, Air Conditioner and Secretariat which in Arab world are for instance, hospital is spoken in Arabic as “Mushtashfa” for Post Office, its Bareed, for Air Conditioner, its Mukaif and for Refrigerator, its Tallaja. Such commonly used words impel even the non-native speakers to use the Arabic substitutes while communicating the needs for these words. In no part of the world the problem with regard to the acquisition of the foreign language is as difficult as the Arab world. Part of the problem has a foundation in its oppressed psychology or the adamant supposition that the language is a cultural invasion which it's not.

There are nine common issues that grapple the problem of teaching English to non-native speakers.

i. Students over reliance on teachers.

Many times, students will automatically look to the teacher for correct answers instead of trying themselves. No serious effort is made by the students to do things on their own.

ii. Persistent use of first-language

A more regular use of the native language without making it a judicious blend of the two the native and the foreign languages. This is mostly done by the teachers of the Arab world who tend to over use the native language. This does not motivate the students nor inspire them to think in the language they are to learn.

iii. Student is reluctant learners and the reliance on a good student of the class.

Majority of the students in a class rely on some bright faces to do things for them and the reluctance to learn becomes too obvious.

iv. Students insistence to prune the syllabus.

Teachers from outside the Arab world tend to succumb to the pressures exerted by the students to prune the syllabus and make that a selective study which a teacher does.

He is not confident handling the pressures and this greatly hinders the growth of interest on the part of the non-native learners of English.

v. Personalities clash.

Certain students tend to dominate the class or frighten the teachers either to deduce favour or keep things simple for the students.

vi. Students unclear what to do, or do the wrong thing.

The students in Arab world are generally confused as to the way they can approach the learning of English ;language.

vii. Students are bored, inattentive, or unmotivated.

Dull presentation, insipid techniques, drowsy appearances, fatigued surrender are some the reasons why the learners do not elicit the desired responses. The trainer must motivate them.

viii. The Goal of Teaching.

The goal of teaching must be very clear so what exactly can be done to stimulate interests in students and to justify the teaching of a language a learner might think he does not need that language.

ix. Terror factor.

The learners of the foreign language tend to perceive that English is the hardest of the tasks to crack and thus it generates terror among them based on some apparent confusion carried forward by them into the classroom.

CONCLUSION

The factors quoted are generally the hurdles in teaching English language which is one part of the problem and once they are vexed or realize that the idiosyncrasies of the language leave them in a certain degree of discomfiture about their own misconceptions envisaged at the very outset of a course, the road ahead does become too hot to handle. Based on my experiences and given the adverse milieu in which the English language is taught it becomes a greater proposition to tackle the issues that emanate from the linguistic involution and its character. No language in the world is without its share of complexities and thus if the environment is not conducive to the learning act then i am afraid the challenge becomes even more stiff. Culture as we saw creates a few psychological barriers but they can be negotiated if the trainer deals with the issue of teaching a foreign language without being emotive and in isolation of its political colour. The assumptions now become realities regarding the level of fear that exists in the learning of English language and to sooth and mollify the frayed cultural tempers much would depend on the skills and techniques of the trainer. Thus it becomes abundantly clear that teaching English language in Saudi Arabia is a tough task rendered more difficult by the native teachers of Arab world who tend to simplify the language's rigorous discourse into a commonplace learning act by an overdose of local language.

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